

Sports Opinion



Shannon Heffelfinger

NU's Evans finally back after injury

Seven months ago, as he lay on the mats in the Bob Devaney Sports Center gymnastics room, Nebraska I-back DeAngelo Evans said he always thought he'd go through something like this. Something that would test his drive and ambition and the reality of who he had always thought he was. Something that would make him a better person for surviving.

I asked him questions between his exercises that day. DN photographer Matt Miller shot a few rolls of film. We watched for two hours as Evans struggled through his workout. Both of us knew we had a good story on our hands — DeAngelo Evans, a rising star as a freshman, could hardly complete an average workout after injuring the muscles in his pelvic area at the end of the 1996 season.

But the whole time, I felt guilty. I felt like we were taking advantage of Evans' fight to return to the football field. Yeah, it was a good story — but only if Evans made it back.

And I didn't think he'd ever play again.

But against all odds, Evans will return after an 18-month absence as the No. 1 I-back Saturday against No. 8 Washington. He has worked longer and fought harder than most people know.

When Matt and I decided to do that story last January, Evans had hit a low point. He hadn't played in a game in over a year. He had endured two surgeries and a misdiagnosis. He had lost most of his strength. And as a last resort, NU trainer Doak Ostergard and Husker Gymnastics Coach Francis Allen had devised a rehabilitation plan for Evans that included various gymnastic exercises and no weight lifting.

As Matt and I watched that day, Evans struggled to climb a rope suspended from the ceiling. He couldn't do much more than five consecutive pull-ups. Ostergard asked him to kick his feet up against the wall and stand on his hands for a minute. He made it for 45 seconds.

Evans did not resemble the football player who ran for 776 yards and a team-leading 14 touchdowns as a freshman in January of 1996.

But two injuries and seven months later, Evans is ready to be that player again. He is an example of what determination and hard work can do. And it's turned out to be a pretty good story.

"Lou Holtz (former Notre Dame Coach) says that 10 percent of life is what happens to you," Evans said. "The other 90 percent is how you react to it."

Obviously, Evans has reacted well.

Heffelfinger is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraska senior staff writer.

Buckhalter takes the 'right path'

By DARREN IVY
Staff writer

It's hard to know where to begin when telling Correll Buckhalter's story.

That's because there are so many stories to tell.

There's the story of the current Nebraska I-back who found his path to the Cornhuskers by evoking images of Walter Payton in high school.

There's his hometown of Collins, Miss., a town consumed by drugs and poverty. A town where everybody works hard, but few escape.

There's the church next to his house, which guided Correll in the right direction.

There's his father, James, who balanced driving a big rig and raising three kids alone for three years. There's his stepmother, Ruth, who raised Correll like he was one of her own.

There's his brother, Chris, who Correll truly loves but never sees.

But if Correll's story has to start somewhere, it might as well be with his right arm.

It's the story of the mother he never knew, and the angel that Correll believes watches over him.

Tattoo

Gracing Correll's right arm is a tattoo of his mother's face — a face he's only seen in family photo albums.

Just 19 months after Correll was born, his mother, Ruth Buckhalter, died after a valve in her heart burst.

Correll was too young to remember his mother before she died, but it left him wondering what his mother was like. He sees pictures and hears stories about her from his father, but nothing can really fill the void.

"Every day I think what it would be like to see her in real life," Correll said.

After each college football game, Correll dedicates his performance to his mother. Last year, he made his ultimate dedication to her, having the tattoo of her face put on his right shoulder.

"That way I could see her whenever I wanted," Correll said as he looked down at her face. "She could

"Correll never had anything handed to him. He grew up working."

ROY FOSTER
Collins High School coach



NEBRASKA I-back Correll Buckhalter shows a picture of his late mother, Ruth, who died when Correll was 19 months old. Buckhalter feels that religion, as well as respect for his family, guided him along the right directions.

SCOTT MCCLURG/DN

always be on my side. I know God has her watching over me as an angel."

And after hearing Correll's story, most would probably agree.

Growing up

When Ruth Buckhalter died in 1980, it was "like murder," James Buckhalter said.

But the Collins native didn't have much time to mourn because he had a family to raise.

James had plenty of experience. After his father had left, he raised his own brother and sister.

A truck driver for 26 years, James said the family survived, but the children

missed their mother.

Chris, Correll's older brother, was 6 years old when his mother died and the only one old enough to remember his mother.

"Correll accepted it and said there was nothing he could do about it," James said. "It's been rough on Chris and Lakeisha (his sister). They missed her more than he did."

When Correll was five, James married another woman. Her name: Ruth.

"He was raised up just like he was one of mine," Ruth said. "I just didn't birth him."

"Correll was respectful. You asked him to do something, and he always would."

Correll also was a hard worker, said Roy Foster, his Collins High School football coach.

He credits Ruth and James for instilling that work ethic in him.

"Correll never had anything

handed to him," Foster said. "He grew up working."

Hometown

Correll was a product of the two communities he grew up in.

He lived in Lilly Valley, but went to school in Collins, 10 miles away. Foster said hardworking people are common in Lilly Valley and Collins, with a population of 2,541.

But the hard work doesn't seem to get most of them anywhere. Located in south-central Mississippi, Collins' socioeconomic status is toward the bottom in the state, Foster said. The population consists of an equal number of whites and blacks.

"It's a typical rural, south-central Mississippi town," Foster said. "It's very blue-collar and you don't have to lock your doors when you go to bed."

James, who has lived in Collins

Please see PATH on 11

UW coach: Scales tip in NU's favor

By SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior staff writer

Most coaches admit that preparing to play the Nebraska football team presents problems for their defenses. Most agree it's difficult to study the intricacies of the option and even harder to duplicate it in practice.

For Washington Coach Jim Lambright, the assignment is more perplexing than normal. That's because tapes of

Nebraska's first three games reveal little about its biggest option threats — quar-

terback Bobby Newcombe and running back DeAngelo Evans.

Newcombe and Evans will play together for the first time in their careers this Saturday when the Cornhuskers (3-0) play host to Washington (2-0) at 2:30 p.m. at Memorial Stadium.

And neither Lambright nor the UW defense knows what to expect.

"The fact that they're putting two athletes so very productive and that we have not had a chance to look at them on video definitely tips the scales in their favor," Lambright said. "It makes it that much harder for us to prepare."

Evans, a junior who had his left knee scoped on Aug. 22, will start against the Huskies for the first time since his freshman season. An injury to his pelvic muscles sidelined Evans last year.

Newcombe will also start after missing two games because of a slight

tear in his posterior cruciate ligament.

But Lambright is confident in the Washington defense. After a shaky start against Arizona State, the Huskies held BYU to 204 yards of total offense. And UW has sacked opposing quarterbacks 10 times in two games.

Offensively, Lambright thinks UW has an edge with its passing game. He admitted the Washington coaches have paid extra attention to the Nebraska-Louisiana Tech game video closely. Tech quarterback Tim Rattay passed for 590 against NU on Aug. 29.

"It was sure a great video to watch. I'd love to have that wide receiver (Troy Edwards). It does give you some clues. It also gave Nebraska a whole lot to work on immediately after that. You can definitely see their improvement in pass coverage over the last couple of games," he said.



Quarterback Brock Huard, who has connected on 43 of 80 passes for 496 yards and five touchdowns, will be instrumental in UW's edge over NU.

But Washington's offense stalled last week in a 20-10 loss to BYU. The Huskies gained just 100 rushing yards and scored 8 points.

UW tight end Reggie Davis said the Huskies realize they can't defeat Nebraska without a running attack.

"You can't beat a team by being one-dimensional," Reggie Davis said. "We definitely need to have a running game in order to beat Nebraska."